

## I Hate Weeds!

1. Warm-up question: If you had to become a weed, what kind would you choose to be? Explain your choice.
2. Why do you think so many churches place so much emphasis on teaching doctrine and so little on practical spiritual living? How would you weight the relative importance of teaching doctrine versus principles for practical spiritual living?
3. Why do you think Jesus used storytelling, i.e., parables, as his primary teaching method?
4. On Sunday we studied Jesus' Parable of the Wheat & Tares. "Tares" is an old fashioned word for "weeds." Jesus began the parable by saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to. . . ." Jesus used the term "kingdom of heaven" to refer to the movement he was starting, what we today would call the "church movement" or "Christianity." So in this parable, Jesus is going to teach us something important about church life. Read Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-40.
  - a. In this parable, the field represents the world (including the church while it's in the world), the farmer represents Jesus, the wheat represents authentic followers of Jesus, and the weeds represent flawed people. Jesus knew from the outset that his movement would be made up of people, and that where there are people, there will be imperfection and hypocrisy – people failing to live up to their ideals. The teaching point is clear: just as every field has weeds, so too every church will have weeds, i.e., lots of imperfect people. Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to warn us about the imperfections that would inhabit his churches?
  - b. Sometimes we succumb to the fantasy that somewhere out there we're going to finally find the perfect church – a place where everybody's always sincere, where everybody acts like Jesus, where mistakes are never made, conflict never occurs, and hypocrisy is never found. Why do you think so many people buy into this fantasy, only to end up being bitterly disappointed time and time again?
  - c. When we encounter weeds, our natural instinct is to pluck them up. It's the same when we encounter flawed people in spiritual community; our natural instinct is to want to pluck them out. In our parable, Jesus says not to. Why? What are some of the possible reasons behind this advice he gave us?
  - d. On Sunday Jeff said, "The truth is, at various times every single one of us is sometimes wheat and sometimes weed. Both good and bad gets entangled within us. If we're going to pluck out all the weeds in spiritual community, we'd end up plucking ourselves out. We all contribute to making spiritual community imperfect." Are you comfortable acknowledging that all of us are, at various times, hypocrites? Can you think of a time when you did something in church community – or elsewhere – that you wish you could take back?

- e. The point of Jesus' parable is not that we should keep going to a church no matter how bad or corrupt it might get. There are exceptions to every rule. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There's a time to plant and a time to pluck up." So the point is not that we should never leave a church because of corruption. The point is, we should leave only as a last resort for truly huge reasons. Have you ever felt you had to leave a church? Looking back, do you feel that was the right decision?
  - f. If church life is always going to be messy, that raises the question, "Why should I bother? Why shouldn't I just go it alone spiritually?" Jeff gave us an example of a 4<sup>th</sup> century "desert monk" named Pachomius [pah-koh-MEE-us] who gave up isolation in favor of living in close community with other believers because he concluded that we can only learn to love as God does when we're immersed in community with each other. How would you answer someone who asked you, "Why do you put up with all the frustrations and imperfections of being part of a church community? Why do you bother?"
  - g. Read John Weberg's quote found on p. 3. Does it resonate with you? What are your thoughts?
5. Although spiritual community is the focus of Jesus' parable, the principles he teaches there apply to many aspects of life, including our relationships. Just as there is no such thing as a perfect church, there's also no such thing as a perfect relationship. Every field has weeds. So, instead of plucking up imperfect relationships, Jeff suggested we should accept the inevitability of the imperfections and push through those imperfections, absent truly overwhelming reasons to end a relationship.
- a. Do you buy that? If so, why – why is it important to fight through all the challenges presented by close personal relationships?
  - b. As a general rule, do you think people are too quick to give up on relationships? Do you think you, personally, tend to be too quick to give up?
  - c. Leonard Cohen described marriage as "the hottest furnace of the spirit." He said, "Marriage is a situation where there are no alibis, excruciating most of the time, but it's only in this situation that any kind of work can be done." What do you think he means? Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. Jeff also applied the teaching of Jesus' parable to the seasons of our life. Every field has weeds. There are no perfect seasons of life. Jeff said, "Instead of embracing the beauty of what is in any given season of life, we have a tendency to always pine for some mystical future golden age when all problems melt away. Don't give up on your current season of life. Instead of focusing on the weeds, focus on the wheat. Because even when it's hard, life is good!" Tell us about a season in your life – past or present. What are or were some of the weeds you encountered? And what are or were some of the beautiful things you experienced in that season in spite of the weeds?

## **Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-40**

24 Jesus put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; <sup>25</sup>but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. <sup>26</sup>So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. <sup>27</sup>And the servants of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" <sup>28</sup>He answered, "An enemy has done this." The servants said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" <sup>29</sup>But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup>Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

36 Then Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' <sup>37</sup>He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup>the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup>and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup>Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

### **John Weborg**

"The search for the perfect church is an illusion. Some form of satisfaction [in life] doesn't even stand a chance unless you settle down at a place and serve. The church is a feast, not a taste, a meal, not a nibble. One sits and serves with the same people week after week, receiving and being received, disappointing and being disappointed, hurting and being hurt, caring and being cared for. Church people are in it for the long haul, not the short term."